

## **INDEPENDENT PRESS PROMOTES THE PUBLIC INTEREST, JOURNALIST SAYS**

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**WASHINGTON, SEPTEMBER 6** – It is the responsibility of individual reporters to push for greater independence and to promote what is important for the public interest, says journalist Elizabeth O. Colton.

Journalists around the world must work every day to be independent and fair, Colton said in a USINFO Webchat September 5. “It is a lifetime struggle for all journalists, on all continents.”

Editors and reporters, as well as media owners, need to encourage independence and responsibility, according to Colton.

Journalism is challenging in all societies -- in different ways in different countries, Colton said. In developing countries, where there might not be a tradition of a free press, it is especially important to provide training in best practices of fair, accurate and balanced reporting to encourage professionalism in all media, Colton said.

Reporters are sometimes given great responsibility before they are trained adequately to be fair and accurate, she said. It is the “responsibility of experienced professionals to pass on these standards or ethics of journalism to all entering the field,” she added.

Journalists must work to show they are responsible and to report fairly and accurately because, even in the United States, where the First Amendment to the U.S. Constitution protects freedom of speech and the press, there are always people working to limit press freedom.

Colton said reporters should be willing to cover stories from all sides and to work on the front lines of news gathering. “Embedded” journalists, for example, offer a unique view that can be valuable to readers and viewers. Embedded journalists are reporters who are attached to a military unit involved in an armed conflict.

Colton covered wars both on her own and in “embedded” situations. Now, as a U.S. information officer, she assists journalists embedded with the military.

“It is important for reporters to cover as broadly and widely as possible in any situation -- war and peace -- and their news organizations should present as wide and deep a view as possible,” Colton said.

Because the Internet has increased the speed of news and access to news, it is more important than ever for reporters to check and re-check the facts in their stories and to seek out confirmation with a number of sources before publication, Colton said.

This might mean that the story does not go out for days – and sometimes weeks or months – while the reporter is checking and investigating for full corroboration, Colton said. This can be frustrating to the reporter and to the media organization, she said, but, in the end, a fully sourced, accurate story will show readers and viewers that the news organization is responsible and thus credible -- the one to be watched, read or listened to in the future.

It is also important, she said, to encourage reporters to cover local social, economic and environmental issues and to receive training in these specific areas.

The best way to begin solving many local problems, Colton said, is to get widespread and continuing coverage of these issues. "Then people begin to confront these issues as civil society."

Colton, an Emmy Award-winning overseas producer for ABC News who has worked in both broadcast and print media, now serves as the press attaché at the U.S. Embassy in Islamabad, Pakistan. She also has served as the press attaché at the U.S. Embassy in Baghdad, Iraq, and as a public affairs officer at the U.S. embassies in Khartoum, Sudan, and Algiers, Algeria.

A transcript ( <http://usinfo.state.gov/xarchives/display.html?p=washfile-english&y=2007&m=September&x=20070905162635eaifas0.2947046> ) of Colton's discussion and information on previous and upcoming webchats are available on USINFO's Webchat Station ( <http://usinfo.state.gov/usinfo/Products/Webchats.html> ).

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*Note: A Bangla translation of this article is also available from the American Center. If you are interested in the translation, please contact the American Center Press Section, Tel: 8837150-4, Fax: 9885688; e-mail: [DhakaPA@state.gov](mailto:DhakaPA@state.gov); Website: [http:// dhaka.usembassy.gov](http://dhaka.usembassy.gov)*